



ARTS OF LIBERTY

*A Project of the University of Dallas*



*Critique of Pure Reason*

Kant

# Study Guide for Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason:* Preface and Introduction [2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

How does human cognition begin, according to Kant? What is the distinction between starting “with experience” and starting “from experience” (44)? What besides experience is present in our cognition (43–45<sup>1</sup>)?

What does Kant mean by “a priori cognitions” and “empirical cognitions”? How do these relate to experience, in terms of priority and posteriority? What is distinct about “pure” a priori cognitions (45)?

What two characteristics does Kant find “by which we can safely distinguish a pure cognition from empirical ones” (46)? Explain how he argues that each is such a characteristic. What is empirical universality, and why is it not sufficient? How do the two characteristics stand in relation to one another (46)?

Kant claims that “it is easy to show that in human cognition there actually are . . . pure a priori judgments” (46). Consider how he shows this:

- What is taken as *given* in the first way, by examples “from the sciences” (46) and “from the most ordinary use of understanding” (47)?
- Explain how he establishes “a priori” (47) the existence of these judgments. Is he assuming that our experience is certain? If so, why is he making such an assumption?
- What is shown in the fact that certain cognitions “even leave the realm of all possible experiences” (48)? Does Kant’s demonstration assume that this kind of speculation is possible, or merely take as rhetorical evidence the fact that some have tried such speculation?
- Are these sufficient proofs? What objections might one make against either of these two arguments?

---

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996. (All page numbers refer to this edition.)



What is metaphysics? Why does Kant regard these inquiries as “far superior in importance, and their final aim as much more sublime, than anything that our understanding can learn in the realm of appearances” (48)? What questions does metaphysics address (48)?

What was the fate of all previous metaphysical systems, according to Kant? What did those systems lack, which led to this fate? Explain why Kant thinks that Plato “failed to make headway” (50).

What is a *judgment*? What is the difference between *analytic* and *synthetic* judgment, and why does Kant call them, respectively, “elucidatory” and “expansive” (51)? Why are experiential judgments necessarily synthetic, and what makes possible such a synthesis? Why must there be something else, which is not experience, that makes synthesis possible a priori?

Evaluate Kant’s claims about synthetic a priori judgments in mathematics, natural science, and metaphysics:

- Explain Kant’s argument that “mathematical judgments are one and all synthetic” (55).
  - How does he support this claim with the example of the proposition  $7 + 5 = 12$ ? Is his claim convincing, that these judgments can only be made by means of “intuition” (57)?
  - Why does Kant claim that even the analytic propositions assumed by geometers “are admitted in mathematics only because they can be exhibited in intuition” (57)?
- What role do synthetic a priori judgments play in natural science? Are his examples convincing (58)?
- Why does metaphysics consist, “at least in terms of its purpose, of nothing but synthetic a priori propositions” (59)? Does this seem right?

Why does Kant claim that “Whether metaphysics stands or falls” depends on the question, “How are synthetic judgments possible a priori?” (59)? What does he mean by this question? What is at stake—why are synthetic a priori judgments the key to metaphysics? Also, why does Kant claim that David Hume came closest to this problem, but did not envisage it in its universality? According to Kant, what did Hume see rightly, and where did he go astray?



Why does Kant give the question “How is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?” before the question “How is metaphysics as a science possible?” (62)? How are these questions related? How can they be answered?

What is the *critique of pure reason*? What is *transcendental philosophy*? Why is the critique the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason? What is the object of the critique, and how does this show that “we may hope to complete it entirely” (65)? (See Chapter VII, pp. 63–8.)

Explain the division of the critique into *doctrine of elements* and *doctrine of method*. Why is this division proper? Why does the transcendental doctrine of sense have to belong to the first part of the science of elements (67–8)?

Consider Kant’s outline of the history and progress of the sciences of logic, mathematics, and natural science (15–20). What answer does he supply to the question, “Why is it, then, that in metaphysics we have thus far been unable to find the secure path of science?” (20)?

What is the “transformation of the way of thinking” (21) that Kant wishes to accomplish for metaphysics; what is the “complete revolution” (26)? In pursuit of this, what “experiment” does Kant carry out, and with what success does it meet (21–3)?

How does taking an object “in two different senses, viz., as appearance and as thing in itself” (29) solve the contradictions of God, freedom, and immortality? What does he mean in saying, “I therefore had to annul *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” (31)?

What sort of “treasure” does Kant mean to “bequeath to posterity” by means of this critique (27)? What will be its benefit? Why does he claim that the “primary and most important concern of philosophy is to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its detrimental influence, by obstructing the source of its errors” (32)? What effect will the critique have on materialism, fatalism, etc. (34)? Can we see at this point how it will accomplish this?



# Study Guide for Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason:* Transcendental Aesthetics

Consider the following terms. First give Kant's definition, then answer the questions.

- *Intuition* (71). What are the "objects" Kant refers to? What does it mean that thought aims at intuition "as a means" (71)?
- *Sensibility* (72). How does this relate to intuition? What does it give us?
  - *Understanding* (72). How does understanding relate to sensibility? What arises from it? How do intuitions compare with concepts?
  - In what way is all thought dependent on intuitions, and thus on sensibility (72)?
- *Sensation* (72). What is meant by "our capacity for presentation"?
- *Empirical intuition* (73) and *appearance* (73).
- *Matter* and *form* of an appearance (73).
- *Pure* (73). From this, what is "pure intuition"? Can anything else be pure? Does "pure" add anything to "form"?
- *Transcendental aesthetic* (73). How will Kant proceed in this study? What do we aim to consider in its own right?

Why does Kant believe that "the form of all appearance must altogether lie ready for the sensations a priori in the mind" (73)? What follows from this? Why is this important for his project in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, and *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole?

*How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?* To answer this, consider the following:

What does Kant mean by "outer sense" and "inner sense" (76–7, 88)? What kind of objects does each give? How does he know that space is the form of outer sense?

What is Kant's argument for the claim that "space is not an empirical concept" (77)? What are the assumptions and starting points of this argument? Is it convincing?



Explain the meaning of the claim: “an a priori intuition of [space] . . . underlies all concepts of space” (78). How is space as a concept distinct from space as an intuition? Why is the intuition of space the original presentation (79)?

On page 80, Kant claims that “Our explication of the concept of space is, therefore, the only one that makes comprehensible the possibility of geometry as a [kind of] synthetic a priori cognition.” How does his proposal make geometry possible as an a priori science (98–9)?

What is the proof for the claim, “Time is not an empirical concept that has been abstracted from any experience” (85)? What does it mean to call time “a pure form of sensible intuition” (86)? Do you see reason in your own experience for making these claims?

How does Kant’s understanding of time explain how the general theory of motion is possible (87)?

Why is time the “formal a priori cognition of all appearances generally” (88)? Does space have a correspondingly general application? Explain.

Explain what Kant means by asserting that space and time are “empirically real” and “transcendentally ideal” (82, 89–90). Why, according to Kant, is it true that “the thing in itself [is not] ever at issue in experience” (84)?

How does Kant reply to the objection, “Changes are actual. . . . Now changes are possible only in time. Therefore time is something actual” (90–1)? Explain how Kant can simultaneously hold that “time retains its empirical reality” and that “absolute reality must . . . be denied to time” (91)? What causes some people to make this objection, and what do they fail to remember?

How does Kant defend the claim that his transcendental aesthetic is “as certain and indubitable as can possibly be demanded of a theory that is to serve as an organon” (97)? Is this convincing?

Consider the observation Kant makes to confirm his theory (99–101). Does Kant successfully prove that each sense can “contain in its presentation only the relation of



an object to the subject, but not the intrinsic character belonging to the object in itself" (99)?

What is Kant's answer to the question, "How can a subject inwardly intuit himself?" (100), and how does it fit with his theory?

What mistake did Berkeley make, and how does Kant avoid it (102)? Is this a satisfactory solution?

Explain the distinction between "derivative" and "original" intuition (103). How do we know that man only has the former?

How do the a priori cognitions of space and time "determine their own bounds" (92)? On what grounds does Kant make this claim (92–3)?

**Suggested use:** This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

